

WILFRED OWEN AS ENGLISH SOLDIER AND POET

DR. NEELAM¹ & DR. DEVENDER SINGH²

¹PGT English, GHS Gorchhi, DSE Haryana, India

²Assistant Professor, English Department of LHC, COBS & Hisar, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

Wilfred Owen, known as war poet, is an English soldier and poet, wrote a number of war poems. This work focuses on his writing by providing some of his biographical data and literary works prior to and during the war. The study examines selected poems of Owen from both a thematic and an artistic standpoint. The poems "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Futility," and "Strange Meeting" have been studied here. The goal is to figure out the poems' topics and connect them to the poet's underlying meaning and to investigate Furthermore. In this paper, his thoughts regarding anti-war protest will also be analysed by using the relevant studies. An attempt is made to undertake a critical assessment of these war poems using a close reading of the poems as primary sources and the use of existing critical works as secondary sources in order to bring out the key themes and experiences portrayed in his poetry.

KEYWORDS: Soldier, War, Critical Assessment & Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Owen, an English poet and soldier, described the horrors and reality of trench warfare more brutally and powerfully than any poet before him. His moving poetry has established him as one of the most important voices in the category of War poet. Owen was born in March 1893 in Oswestry, Shropshire, to Tom and Susan, who were both of Welsh descent. Owen's grandpa died, prompting the family to relocate to Birkenhead and subsequently Shrewsbury. Owen was a quiet and passionate youngster who was a devoted Anglican and remained close to his mother throughout his life. He worked at the Berlitz School of Languages in Bordeaux, France, as a private tutor in 1912. When the war started, Owen did not feel compelled to enlist, but later on, he decided to go back, maybe influenced by propaganda from British publications provided to him by his mother. Owen joined the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps in October 1915, and in 1916 he was promoted as the second lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment. At the end of 1916 in France, he was quickly subjected to a series of painful incidents that changed his perspective on war - not by making him a pacifist; instead, it made him realize that it was his responsibility to reveal the atrocities of his fellow soldiers' experiences.

Owen slipped into a shell hole and suffered a concussion after days of trudging through trenches, chemical assaults, and attempting to sleep beside a heavy cannon while enduring the terrible odour of dead soldiers. A trench mortar blew him high into the air, and he laid out on an embankment in Savy Wood for several days. Owen was transferred to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh to recover and be cured, from the shell shock. His doctor advised him to keep a journal of his experiences and dreams from the Western Front. There, he also met fellow poet, long-time dear friend and mentor Siegfried Sassoon MC, a meeting that would change Owen's life forever including his poetry. Owen's mind is filled with horrors and brutal battle scenes. His mind was thoroughly captured

by the battle experience, which sparked his inventiveness. His imagination is so active that it responds to and creates a sense of duty in numerous public domains all over the world. Owen's intellect is inspired by a revolution and strength while choosing his war theme accurately. Life, background, and family, as well as military experience, appear to have had the most influence on him. He moved back to France for his service in August 1918 and was awarded the Military Cross in October. Lewis mentioned that on November 4, 1918, he was killed in combat while attempting to cross the Sambre Canal with his soldiers. (Lewis ix-x). The subject of war, sympathy, sad death, horrors, and anti-war protest are among the key themes in Owen's poetry of war that openly dominate his poems. In his famous remark, "My theme is War, and the pity of War...", he clearly shows the subjects of his poetry. Each literary work, however, has its own themes that revolve around the war and its aftermath.

DISCUSSIONS

Owen wrote most of his famous war poetry between 1917 and 1918, which may have prompted some commentators to label him an enigma. Only four of Owen's poems were published during his lifetime, and his fame came after his death. Owen is a superb poet, and his poetry is mature, as seen by the sincerity and grandeur of his poems' language, the combining of harsh realism with a sensation, and the representation of atrocities. His art matured not by steady development, but through a mental revolution that allowed him to recognise his topic clearly: war and the misery of war. This theme motivated Owen to compose his poems, which contributed to a profound shift in civilians' opinions about the war. He described that war was no longer thought of as anything other than terrible. Owen's ability for composing poetry was shaped by a variety of situations and circumstances. The emotional and spiritual sides of his military service, it appears, were influenced by his time in the trenches. Owen admired English poet John Keats, who motivated him to write poems in a pseudo-Keatsian style.

Owen, according to Kendall, utilised poetry as a kind of rehabilitation. Mentally and emotionally, he wanted to forget about the traumatic experiences that the poems were based on. He sought to keep himself away from evil impulses and liberate his mind from some of the worst memory ever by rewriting the same recollections again and over. Owen's war poetry lies 'in the pity,' referring to sadness for both friends and foes, at a time when the genuine event should have trumped any other creative celebration, such as grandeur, courage, and patriotism. He supported this view by stating that the finest war poetry is a mix of anger and reminiscence, as it sprang from the terrible despair of the First World War. Owen was a forward-thinking poet who included certain cutting-edge techniques and experimented with word in a way that drew the reader into the heart of the scenario. His poems became the site of both testimony and anguish for him. Kendall writes:

A month before his death, Wilfred Owen wrote to Siegfried Sassoon about his servant Jones, 'shot through the head, lay on top of me, soaking my shoulder, for half an hour'. He goes on to elaborate: "Catalogue? Photograph? Can you photograph the crimson-hot iron as it cools from the smelting? This is what Jones's blood looked like, and felt like. My senses are charred. Owen here struggles with the paradoxical notion of sense experience: on the one hand, it is intensely private and stubbornly resists translation, and on the other hand, for it to be shared and communicated, it has to create a retrospective narrative. In order to evoke the judder of the moment, he has recourse here to certain literary devices: images, alliteration, and metaphor. (Kendall 73-74)

Owen's first encounter with "the realities of war" took place at a hospital in France. He sent a letter to his brother Harold in which he expressed reality, pity, and the need of writing as witness. Simultaneously, there was a complete

participation of the body in suffering, shown in childlike doodles or verbal witticism. However, Owen's vivid and powerful imagination, which can be traced back to his pre-war writings, was loaded with pictures of disease and misery. His war poetry, which was largely linked to the realities of trench life, helped to shape the memory of war. The modern war poetry was strengthened by vivid imagery of darkness, firearms, filth, rainfall, smoke, gunfire, grenades, barricades, rodents, fleas, cold, and trenches. He laid forth his opinion in what poetry could do – or could not do – to correctly recall the atrocities of war in a provisional preface, intended for a collection of his work he would never see published.

One of Owen's most famous poems is 'Dulce et Decorum Est.' In 1920, it was published posthumously. The title is a sarcastic reference to a passage from Horace's Latin epic "Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori," which means "It is lovely and appropriate to die for one's country." Owen penned the song in reaction to Jessie Pope, a patriotic poetess whose recruitment poetry inspired many young men to join the fruitless war effort. In line 25, Owen refers to Jessie Pope as 'My Friend,' but how can she be a friend when her artistic works act as an adversary to humanity? Owen used both senses of experience and words to their ultimate boundaries in this poem, which is described as a 'gas poetry.' The terrible times during and after the gas assault cry through the entire lines of the poem, despite the fact that the phrase 'gas poetry' does not properly reflect the characteristics of poetic and conceptual difficulties. Bloom says that, "Owen's goal from such title is to attack the concept that sacrifice is sacred and to destroy the glamorized decency of the war" (Bloom 15)

Owen suggests the facts of the quick and direct impacts of a gas assault in 'Dulce et Decorum Est,' in a picturesque fashion. From the soldier's broken boots to his bloodied mouth, he detailed many aspects of combat, including a midnight patrol, a chemical assault, and severe insanity. The soldiers were tired and drained from the combat, so they retired from the front lines to the war back lines to rest and reorganise themselves before returning to the front lines. They were so exhausted that they were oblivious to the bombs descending from the sky and the gas missiles exploding behind them. They attempted to swiftly put gas masks on, but one soldier lacked the necessary vigour and was late in putting the mask on. It's worth noting that in his poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est,' Owen employs unique sound representation techniques. In his depiction of the gas assault, he shifts from visual sensations to visceral processes. He shifts from noises made between the body and the outside world—fumbling, stumbling, flound'ring, drowning—to sounds made within the body: guttering, choking, writhing, gargling (Kendall 84). In the eighth line, he also used the aesthetics of contradictions: "Of gas-shells descending softly behind." When he states the shells were dropped 'softly,' he portrays the 'dropping' of the fatal 'gas-shells' with a distorted viewpoint. Why are there deadly bombs thrown in such a peaceful scene? Simultaneously, he claims that the shells were dropped 'behind.' The wide sight here is so perplexing, with deadly bombs falling softly and behind them. Owen writes:

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. (Internet)

Owen describes the unique phenomena of indications of what the eyes and ears have experienced in his poem

"Futility." During the war, Owen composed "Futility" in May 1918. It first appeared in *The Nation* in 1918, and it was reprinted after his death in 1920. The poem opens in a trench during the frigid winter of 1916-1917, when Owen and his troops were subjected to incessant enemy bombardment and also the extreme cold. Although the poem appears to embody the stylistic and thematic major qualities of Owen's writings, Kendall argues it does not match Owen's realistic or sarcastic attitude. He also mentioned that Owen focuses his attention to a corpse, a body whose obscurity takes form, and no details are gathered, and he provides with little details of attention, consolation, and sympathy, at the precise time the poem is being written. Owen seeks to create an emotional impact in a nostalgic introduction to home through the poem, which is anti-war, pro-country, and public manipulation. The influence of John Keats has hovered over this poem. Inferentially, the poem's life has been governed by sensations rather than thinking. As a result, the poem's structure dispels any notions of militarism or joy of war.

"Strange Meeting" is also a basis for a significant Owen lyrical work that depicts the topic of war and its repercussions. It was composed in the first part of 1918 and published the following year, in 1919, the year after Owen's death. It is considered as Owen's most famous work, and it, along with other poems, had a vital part in expanding Owen's artistic prominence. The poem itself is a source of contention; several commentators have voiced differing viewpoints on it. The poem is a "great poem as exists in our tongue," according to Osbert Sitwell (Kerr 174). In terms of aesthetic and spiritual manner, John Middleton Murry described the poem as "a true poetic style," "the finding of a genius," and "imaginative sublimation." About this poem, Douglas Kerr says:

This unfinished poem, the most remote and intimate, tranquil and dynamic, of all Owen's imaginative statements of war experience, ... demanded a special place in the foreground, and again this seemed to have to do with its prophetic content, and with its status as somehow Owen's last testament. ... Blunden had first commended "Strange Meeting" as a prophetic poem when he reviewed Sassoon's edition in the *Athenaeum*, 10 December 1920 (176-177)

The poem was written to express a critical feeling against the war. Owen's caustic view of "Foolishness of War" was conveyed via faultless emotions and methods. He sought to bring emphasis to the poem's overarching topic of "Foolishness of War." He writes:

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. (Internet)

CONCLUSIONS

Owen's poetry has provided a platform to those who have been protesting long-term wars that have devastated people's lives. He used irony, strawman arguments, sarcasm, and sometimes outright condemnation to express his disapproval of war, particularly the one he observed: the First World War. His real life experience as a soldier in the trenches appears to

have had a significant effect in the development of his literary skill. Owen's pre-war conditions, which were marked by despair and a gloomy view of life during his labour at Dunsden, created what is known as an upheaval in his psyche, which inspired him to write in such a terrible style. His creative writings revealed life's true adversity. He wished for the war to end in the future, but he died before it did. Despite the fact that his poems contain some harsh and caustic language, they are beautiful creative works that inform the world that military wars will never fix any political issue, no matter how serious it is; on the contrary, they will only bring ruin and human misery.

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